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ABSTRACT

In teaching the moderately retarded student to read, it is essential to develop a basic survival reading vocabulary consisting of words necessary to remain alive, as well as to retain one's personal dignity. The individual must be able to recognize and respond appropriately to common signs of instruction and direction within the community. From a list of 132 basic words and signs, a reading program and teacher's manual were devised according to four objectives: (1) the stimulus word or sign is presented in a form as close to the actual word or sign as possible--photographs of the sign are used frequently; (2) the experience is as pleasant and free from strain and boredom as possible; (3) four presentations of the word assess the student's progress, each at an increasing level of difficulty; and (4) the format and process of administration are clearly defined for the teacher. (MAI)

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A Criterion - Referenced Assessment of Survival Words for Non-Academic Adolescents

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A Criterion - Referenced Assessment of Survival Words
For Non-Academic Adolscents

Every individual who has the ability to live in the community and obtain some degree of mobility and independence must recognize and respond appropriately to functional-survival words. Educators and parents of non-academically oriented students have long recognized the latent abilities of these students to function with dignity in the community and a sheltered working world. Now with the enforcement of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) school personnel are becoming aware of the curricular needs of handicapped students.

When beginning the task of planning curriculum, one of the first questions to be considered is, "What is the purpose of this instruction"? Looking at the area of reading in particular, the curriculum developer and teacher must decide on the purpose for instructing a moderately retarded person. The question then becomes, "What must everyone be able to read and comprehend in order to survive?" The word survive is meant both literally and in an extended notion. Survival in this context means to remain alive as well as retain one's personal dignity. If one enters a room marked PRIVATE, smokes near a NO SMOKING sign or goes in the wrong restroom, personal dignity is in jeopardy. This makes psycho-

logical survival difficult. Therefore, the goal of a reading program for moderately retarded students (I.Q. 36-54) is for the individual to be able to recognize and respond appropriately to common signs of instruction and direction within the community. The reading priority for trainable mentally retarded students is functional-sight vocabulary. Reading in this context is defined as recognizing and responding appropriately to words or signs deemed essential.

After defining this as the goal for the reading instruction, the next task is to determine the exact content to be included in the list of functional-survival words. Teachers must also determine which words are already known at the criterion level, which words are emerging, and which words are not recognized or understood by their students. This task may be accomplished with the criterion-referenced assessment which is the focus of the present paper.

In the literature concerned with teaching the trainable mentally retarded student to read, the concensus is that a basic survival reading vocabulary is essential. Kirk and Johnson (1951) state, "A mentally deficient or feeble-minded child cannot learn to read beyond a few simple words for his protection, hence the reason for lack of emphasis on a systematic reading program in the sense in which reading is ordinarily defined." (p.258)

Stephens (1971) believes that "standing foremost among the concerns for educational programs for the moderately retarded is the development of curriculum." (p.28) Warren (1963) writes that a highly academic program is inappropriate for moderately retarded students if the skills essential for successful functioning as an adult are overlooked. MacMillan (1977) states, "Even children below I.Q. 50 can learn to read at least cautionary signs needed for their own protection or for independent functioning in the community (stop, exit, men, women)." (p. 361) According to Feinberg (1975), "For a training program for TMR adults to be meaningful and ultimately successful it must be reality-based, with a determined focus on survival, self-reliance and normalization." (p. 246).

In light of the need for practical skills for trainable mentally retarded students, Borreca, Burger, Goldstein and Simches (1953) developed a functional core vocabulary list for slow learners. The core vocabulary list consists of 1,042 words with an additional 133 words being purely vocational. Gunzburg believes all students classified as trainable mentally retarded should first be taught a social sight vocabulary because of the extreme importance for safety. Then, if the child can progress further, more instruction should be available. Gunzburg's list consists of 54 functional survival words. A recent Edmark reading program for

students classified as trainable mentally retarded uses stimulus-response theory to teach fifty survival words. Four state schools in Texas, Richmond State School, San Angelo Center, Lufkin State School and Denton State School have developed a comprehensive functional program using behavior shaping techniques. The purpose is to develop sight recognition of environmental/survival words for the safety and well-being of the client, as well as teach socially appropriate behaviors. The survival/environmental words identified by this project consists of twenty-four critical words, twenty important words and sixty-four supplementary words.

Moderately retarded students, classified as trainable mentally retarded can and should be taught a basic sight vocabulary necessary for survival and dignity.

Procedure

Word List

Using sections of the Borreca, Burger, Goldstein and Simches list, words from the Gunzburg list, the Texas State Schools list and ideas from personal experience in teaching trainable mentally retarded students, a list of ninety words was compiled. The list was sent to seven school districts and one private agency serving the trainable mentally retarded to the Greater Houston Metropolitan Area. Teachers of trainable mentally retarded students were asked

to check the words which they felt were essential for their students to recognize and respond to appropriately. They were also asked to add any essential words omitted from the list. Seventy-five questionnaires were sent out to the districts and fifty-four were returned. A new list was then compiled using all of the words checked and added. This list was 317 words long. Using the words considered most important a revised list of 132 words was compiled as the tentative survival words for this program. This list will always remain tentative since various signs are important depending on the locale, the setting (institutional, public school sheltered workshop) and the time period. It has been observed, for instance, that there is an increasing use of International Signs which in turn addes to the survival signs to recognize.

Assessment Instrument

From the list of 132 words a criterion-referenced assessment was developed. Four conditions were taken into consideration in the development of the instrument. First, it is important to present the stimulus word or sign in a form as close to the actual sign or word as possible. One characteristic of mentally retarded learners is the inability to easily transfer information or skills learned in the classroom to real life situations. For this reason photographs of the signs are used whenever possible. A second important consideration is the attention span and interest level of

the students being assessed. The assessment instrument is also to be used as the teaching instrument, therefore, the experience must be as pleasant and free from boredom or strain as possible. Therefore, only twelve words are included in each booklet, each word being presented in four different forms. Another consideration is that the teachers need as much information as possible concerning the student's abilities to recognize and respond to the sign or words.

Therefore each of the four presentations of the word assess at an increasing level of difficulty. The first presentation asks the student to say the words(s) and tell what they mean. If this task is not accomplished the student is shown the second and most elementary task. Three signs or words are shown, two being the stimulus sign and the third, a distractor. The student is asked to match the like signs. The third presentation is of two signs. The teacher names the sign and asks the student to point to the one named. The fourth and final presentation is one picture of a person responding inappropriately to the sign. The student is to choose the correct picture. The fourth consideration is to make the format and process of administration as easy as possible for the teacher. The booklets are clearly marked as to word or sign to present, the instructions are on the back of the stimulus sign so that they can be read easily and naturally as the teacher is

giv'ng the assessment.

Assessment Manual Teaching Suggestions

Recommendations for teaching the survival words are included in the criterion-referenced assessment manual. The first consideration is: Did the student clarly understand the question asked? Were the directions understandable so that the reason for error was not knowing and understanding the sign. After the task is thoroughly understood the actual teaching begins. Configuration clues are emphasized in teaching the student to distinguish the two signs that match from the one sign that does not match. Recognition and identification of the sign after hearing the auditory stimulus (third presentation in criterion-referenced assessment) is taught using a technique similar to Montessori's Three Period Lesson. This procedure is followed using increasing numbers of signs taken from the assessment booklet. When the word can be identified using an auditory stimulus to match the visual stimulus, appropriate response to the word or sign is emphasized. It is suggested that this be done using a multiple questioning technique so that the student discovers the appropriate response. Questions such as: What is happening in the picture? What does the sign say and mean? Is what is happening in the picture agreeing with what the sign says? Why or why not? The teacher is free, however, to use whatever approaches to teaching of the survival

words she finds most successful.

Discussion

The importance place on education for all handicapped children emphasizes the need for curriculum materials which are interesting, appropriate to the students skills and abilities and futuristically oriented. For the student classified as trainable mentally retarded, the reading program must emphasize the recognition and proper response to words of survival and dignity. (In order to meet this goal, teachers need the diagnostic materials, teaching materials and ideas for helping special students to reach their potentials.) The criterion-referenced assessment discussed in this paper was designed to meet these needs.

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WORDS FOR SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY

ADDRESS
AGE
AMBULANCE
AUTHORIZED PERSONS ONLY
BACK
BATHROOMS
BEWARE OF DOG
BIRTHDATE
BLASTING
BOTTOM
BOYS
BUS STOP
BREAKABLE
CAFETERIA
CASHIER
CAUTION
CLINIC
CLOSED
COLD
CROSS NOW
DANGER
DATE
DETOUR
DIME
DIRECTIONS
DIRECTORY
DO NOT CROSS
DO NOT DISTURB
DO NOT ENTER
DO NOT FEED ANIMALS
DO NOT TOUCH
DON'T WALK
DOWN
DYNAMITE
ELEVATORS
EMERGENCY
EMPLOYEES ONLY
ENTER
ENTRANCE
EXIT
EXPLOSIVES
FEMALE
FIRE ALARM
FIRE ESCAPE
FIRE EXTINGUISHER
FIRST AID
FIRST FLOOR
FLAMMABLE
FOR RENT
FRAGILE
FREE
FRONT
GENTLEMEN
GIRLS
GLASS
GO
HANDICAPPED
HANDLE WITH CARE
HARD HAT AREA
HARMFUL IF SWALLOWED
HELP WANTED
HIGH VOLTAGE
HOLD ON TO RAIL
HOT
IN
INFORMATION
INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR MEN
INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR WOMEN
KEEP CLOSED
KEEP OUT
KEEP OUT
LADIES
LEFT
MALE
MEN AT WORK
MEN ONLY
NAME
NO ADMITTANCE
NO SMOKING
NO TRESPASSING
NON FLAMMABLE
OCCUPIED
OFF
ON
ONE WAY ONLY
OPEN
OPEN HERE
OPEN OTHER END
OUT
OUT OF ORDER
PHONE
PHONE NUMBER
PLEASE BE SEATED
PLEASE PAY HERE
PLEASE USE OTHER DOOR
POISON
PRESS
PRIVATE
PULL
PUSH
PUSH BUTTON
QUIET
RADIO ACTIVE
RAILROAD CROSSING
REST ROOMS
RESTAURANT
RIGHT
SALE
SECOND FLOOR
SILENCE
SLIPPERY WHEN WET
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER
STAIRS
STEP UP
STOP
TAKE ONE
TELEPHONE
TOP
THIS SIDE UP
THIS WAY OUT
TOILET
TURN OFF
UP
USE CROSS WALK
VACANCY
WAIT
WALK
WATCH FOR CARS
WATCH YOUR STEP
WET FLOOR
WET PAINT
WOMEN